

Bridging cultures: An evaluation of the Chinese translation of O. Henry's "The Last Leaf"

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Abstract: The study examines the difficulty of effectively translating the stylistic and cultural subtleties of O. Henry's "The Last Leaf" into Chinese, considering the language and cultural differences between English and Chinese. This study seeks to examine the translation strategies employed by Huang Yuan Shen in the Chinese version of "The Last Leaf" utilizing Bell's framework, determining the prevalence and efficacy of each strategy. A line-by-line qualitative and quantitative comparison analysis was performed between the English source text and the Chinese target text, utilizing Bell's nine translation strategies as the coding framework. The study revealed that all nine tactics were utilized, with domestication (32.7%) being the most prevalent and speech act alteration (3.32%) the least adopted, hence improving the clarity, appeal, and cultural accessibility of the translation. These findings emphasize the significance of strategy selection in literary translation, illustrating how the proper use of domestication and other approaches can maintain narrative intent while aligning with the cultural context of the target audience.

Keywords: comparative analysis; intercultural communication; short story translation; translation assessment, translation strategies

1. Introduction

In a time characterized by heightened globalization and intercultural engagement, translation has emerged as a crucial instrument for conveying knowledge, beliefs, and cultural expressions across linguistic divides (El-dali, 2011; House, 2015). Literary translation is essential for enhancing global literature and promoting cross-cultural comprehension (Njongse, 2024). Short stories provide distinct challenges owing to their conciseness, emotional depth, and dependence on cultural nuances (Naveen & Trojovský, 2024; Schachtner, 2020). Translating Western literary works into Chinese necessitates linguistic precision and cultural awareness, particularly for narratives abundant in symbolic imagery and narrative subtleties—exemplified by O. Henry's *The Last Leaf*, a renowned American short story esteemed for its themes of hope, sacrifice, and human connection. Despite the increasing interest in literary translation, a significant research vacuum persists in the rigorous evaluation of translation procedures employed in particular short tales. Although numerous academics have suggested diverse theoretical frameworks, few studies have utilized Bell (1991) nine pragmatic translation procedures to assess how translators manage non-equivalence, emotional tone, and cultural adaptation in brief literary texts. Specifically, there is an absence of comprehensive comparative analysis between the English source text of *The Last Leaf* and its Chinese translation by Huang Yuan Shen. This gap offers a significant opportunity to examine the use of theoretical translation procedures in practice and their

impact on the readability, cultural accessibility, and emotional resonance of the translated text for Chinese readers.

Furthermore, contemporary literary translation functions as an essential conduit between cultures, facilitating the exchange of tales, values, and artistic expressions across linguistic divides ([Ahmadova, 2025](#)). The translation of short stories, specifically, poses distinct obstacles because to their brevity, intricate symbolism, and cultural subtleties ([Abdelaal, 2024](#)). Recent studies have underscored the intricacies of literary translation, stressing the necessity for tactics that maintain the original text's stylistic and cultural nuances while ensuring accessibility for the intended audience.

Notwithstanding the expanding corpus of research on translation strategies, a significant vacuum persists in the application of established theoretical frameworks to particular literary texts. [Bell \(1991\)](#) model of nine pragmatic translation strategies provides a thorough framework for translation assessment but its utilization in translating short stories, particularly from English to Chinese, has been restricted. This disparity is most obvious in O. Henry's "The Last Leaf," a narrative celebrated for its emotional profundity and cultural relevance. A careful examination of its Chinese translation utilizing Bell's methodology may yield significant insights regarding the efficacy of diverse translation procedures in maintaining the narrative's original essence. Its goal is to satisfy people's interest about the cultures of different countries while also advancing literary culture. It is a difficult task to translate literature between languages. The importance of literary translators' contributions must therefore be emphasized ([Dewi, 2020](#)).

This study aimed to see the translation procedures used in Huang Yuan Shen's (黄源深) Chinese rendition of "The Last Leaf" by O. Henry, referring to Bell's theory (1991) by answering the following questions:

1. What are the translation strategies used in Huang Yuan Shen's (黄源深) Chinese rendition of "The Last Leaf" by O. Henry?
2. What strategies are predominantly used in Huang Yuan Shen's (黄源深) Chinese rendition of "The Last Leaf" by O. Henry, and why?
3. What is the most effective strategy used in Chinese translation style to reach the clarity, effectiveness, and interest from readers, and how?

2. Literature review

2.1 Contemporary approaches to literary translation

In recent years, literary translation has garnered increased scholarly attention, emphasizing the translator's role in bridging cultural and linguistic gaps. [Hahn \(2022\)](#) highlights the creative decisions translators make to preserve the stylistic and cultural nuances of the source text, underscoring that translation is not merely a linguistic substitution but an art form that requires deep cultural understanding. Advancements in technology have introduced new tools for translation evaluation. [Zhang et al. \(2025\)](#) introduced TransProQA, an LLM-based metric designed to assess literary translations by focusing on elements like literary devices, cultural understanding, and authorial voice. This approach addresses the limitations of traditional metrics that often prioritize mechanical accuracy over artistic expression. Furthermore, the integration of corpus-based methods has provided insights into translator decision-making processes.

2.2 Application of Bell's (1991) translation strategies in recent studies

[Bell \(1991\)](#) model, which outlines nine pragmatic translation strategies, remains influential in translation studies. Recent research has applied Bell's framework to various texts to assess translation quality and strategy effectiveness. The implementation of Bell's model can improve translation quality by providing a structured approach to addressing equivalence issues ([Suyasa, 2024](#)). In addition, Bell's strategy in contemporary translation practice, emphasizing its applicability in achieving idiomatic and culturally appropriate translations ([Kashgary, 2011](#)). These recent studies underscore the continued relevance of Bell's model in guiding translators through the complexities of literary translation, especially when dealing with culturally rich texts like O. Henry's *The Last Leaf*.

2.3 Integration of AI and LLMs in literary translation evaluation

The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Large Language Models (LLMs) has significantly influenced the field of literary translation. Traditional evaluation metrics often prioritize mechanical accuracy, potentially overlooking the nuanced artistic elements of literary texts. To address this, [Zhang et al. \(2025\)](#) introduced TransProQA, an LLM-based evaluation metric that emphasizes literary devices, cultural understanding, and authorial voice, aiming to provide a more holistic assessment of literary translations.

However, the integration of AI in literary translation is not without challenges. A study by [Li & Brom \(2025\)](#) highlighted the difficulties LLMs face in preserving poetic intent and cultural nuances, particularly in Chinese-English translations. Their research underscores the limitations of current AI models in capturing the depth of literary texts. Furthermore, the impact of post-editing machine-translated literary texts on creativity and reader engagement has been a subject of investigation. [Guerberof-Arenas & Toral \(2020\)](#) found that while post-editing can improve efficiency, it may compromise the creative quality of translations, affecting the overall reading experience.

3. Methods

This study used a qualitative content analysis method to analyze the data. The Bell's theory was applied in comprehensively examining the translation procedures employed in the Chinese rendition of *The Last Leaf* by O. Henry. It included Addition, Omission, Explication, Implication, Domestication, Foreignization, Formality Change, Speech Act Change, and Trans-Editing [Bell \(1991\)](#). The emphasis was on a line-by-line analysis of the original English text as the Source Text (ST) and its Chinese translation as the Target Text (TT) to identify, categorize, and assess the employed strategies. The data collection strategy involved segmenting the ST and TT into corresponding lines or units for direct comparison to the original English edition of *The Last Leaf* by O. Henry and the Target Text (TT): A published Chinese translation of *The Last Leaf*. During the analysis, each sentence or segment from ST will be juxtaposed with its equivalent segment in the TT to identify and analyze differences in linguistic choices, cultural adaptations, and stylistic adjustments.

3.1 Bell's pragmatic strategies

The key theory of [Bell \(1991\)](#) on translation, as presented in "Translation and Translating: Theory and Practice", centers around a pragmatic approach to translation. Bell defines translation as the replacement of a representation of a text in one language by a representation of an equivalent text in a second language. There are four core elements in Bell's theory such as, (i) equivalence-oriented approach, (ii) three levels of Language, (iii) pragmatic translation strategies and (iv) functional and communicative emphasis. Bell emphasizes equivalence in meaning, not a word-for-word translation,

focusing on conveying the same communicative intent from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). Moreover, Bell divides language into three interdependent levels for the translators such as Syntactic level (structure and grammar), Semantic level (meaning of words and sentences) and the Pragmatic level (contextual and communicative function). In order to implement this paper, the researcher used pragmatic translation strategies Bell proposed. There are nine pragmatic translation strategies to manage the gaps between languages and cultures. Bell focuses on how the translation functions in its new context, encouraging translators to consider intentionality, acceptability, and situationality—how meaning is understood by the target audience.

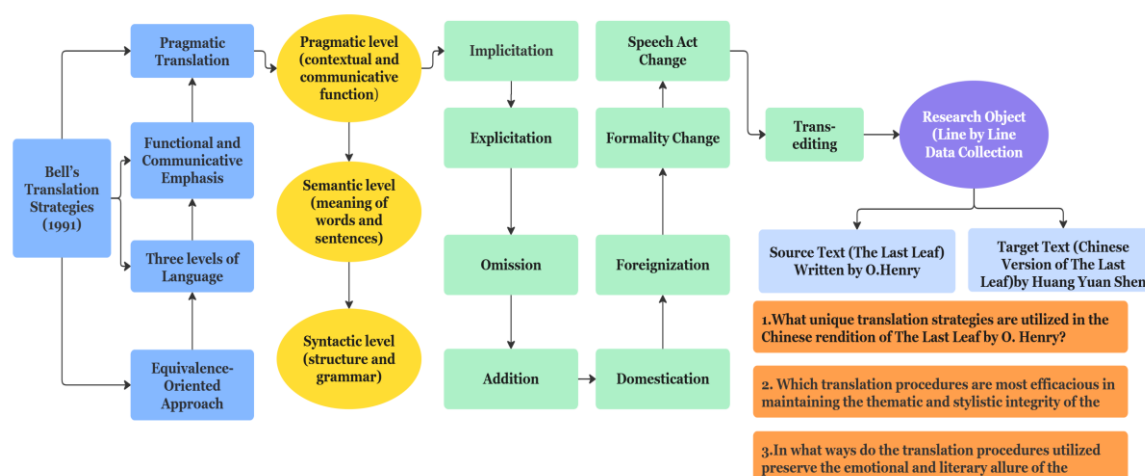


Figure 1. Process of the translation strategies in this research

In summary, [Bell \(1991\)](#) sees translation as a complex cognitive and communicative act that requires balancing linguistic accuracy with cultural and contextual appropriateness. His model is practical and widely applied in translation assessments and training. According to [Bell \(1991\)](#), pragmatics is more than just syntax and meaning. It includes tactics and objectives, alongside the literary characteristics of intentionality, acceptability, and situationality—representing the viewpoints of both the producer and the recipient of the text, as well as its relevance to the context of application. This is the most common way to translate:

- 1) Addition : adding things to make meaning clearer
- 2) Omission : eliminating unnecessary elements in the target language
- 3) Explicitation : making something that isn't obvious clear
- 4) Implication : hiding something that is clear
- 5) Domestication : modifying text to align with target language culture
- 6) Foreignization : maintaining characteristics of source language culture
- 7) Modification of Formality : adjusting levels of formality to align with the target language environment
- 8) Speech act modification : altering the function of an utterance (e.g., transforming a statement into a question)
- 9) Transediting : the amalgamation of translation and editing to cater to the target language audience

3.2 Data collection and analysis

Data collection involved the application of nine aspects of Bell's pragmatic strategies (1991) to examine and analyze the translated text by Huang Yuan Shen (黄源深), Using the same codes to represent these nine practical tactics while gathering and analysing data. The appendix will provide a detailed line-by-line examination of the data gathering.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| (1) Translation by Addition | -S1 (Addition) |
| (2) Translation by Omission | -S2 (Omission) |
| (3) Translation by Explication | -S3 (Explication) |
| (4) Translation by Implication | -S4 (Implication) |
| (5) Translation by Domestication | -S5 (Domestication) |
| (6) Translation by Foreignization | -S6 (Foreignization) |
| (7) Translation by Formality Change | -S7 (Formality Change) |
| (8) Translation by Speech Act Change | -S8 (Speech Act Change) |
| (9) Translton by Trans-editing | -S9 (Trans-editing) |

4. Results

This research paper analyses the translation techniques utilised by Huang Yuan Shen in adapting O. Henry's short story "The Last Leaf" into the Chinese version "最后一片叶子". The original author highlights the two young painters and their emotions and affection for each other. The original author closed the narrative with an unexpected twist. The translator utilises several translation techniques to convey the story's original message.

After an extensive review of the translation strategies applied in the short story "The Last Leaf," it was concluded that the translator employed addition 18 times, making up 8.53%; omission 39 times, representing 18.48%; explication 19 times, constituting 9%; and implication 8 times, comprising 3.79%. The domesticating translation strategy was implemented 69 times, comprising 32.7%; the foreignization strategy was utilised 22 times, corresponding to 10.43%; the formality change strategy was applied 20 times, accounting for 9.48%; the speech act change strategy was employed 7 times, constituting 3.32%; and the trans-editing strategy was executed 9 times, corresponding to 4.27%.

Table 1. The frequency of translation strategies found in Huan Yuan Shen's (黄源深) Chinese version of "The Last Leaf" by O. Henry

Sr No.	Strategies	Frequencies of strategies used	Percentage
1	Translation by "Addition"	18	8.53%
2	Translation by "Omission"	39	18.48%
3	Translation by "Explication"	19	9.00%
4	Translation by "Implication"	8	3.79%
5	Translation by "Domestication"	69	32.7%
6	Translation by "Foreignization"	22	10.43%
7	Translation by "Formality Change"	20	9.48%
8	Translation by "Speech Act Change"	7	3.32%
9	Translation by "Trans-editing"	9	4.27%
Total translation strategies of the translator used		211	100%

The analysis of the output data indicates that the translator utilised all nine translation strategies comprehensively. Notwithstanding the narrative's conciseness, the translator's expertise and translation abilities are apparent. Of the nine techniques, implicitation (S3) is the least frequently encountered in brief works. It is solely discernible in novellas and novels. In these short stories, it is apparent that the translator utilised this method to maintain the original text's meaning. The translator used the eighth strategy (S8), which is changing the speech act, the least in this version. He was hesitant to implement substantial modifications to maintain the original meaning in the target text, especially for Chinese.

Moreover, it is apparent that the translator primarily utilised the fifth strategy (S5), translation by domestication, more than the other nine strategies. It occurs 69 times, constituting 32.7%. The translation clearly cared about his Chinese readers because he tried to fully understand and show their culture. The study revealed that the Chinese language had considerable lexical strength through the analysis of the translated text of "The Last Leaf." The famous author O. Henry puts a lot of pressure on the translator Huang Yuan Shen (黄源深) to keep the original meaning and purpose while also addressing the differences in culture between the West and the East. Nonetheless, the translator can depict with some proficiency.

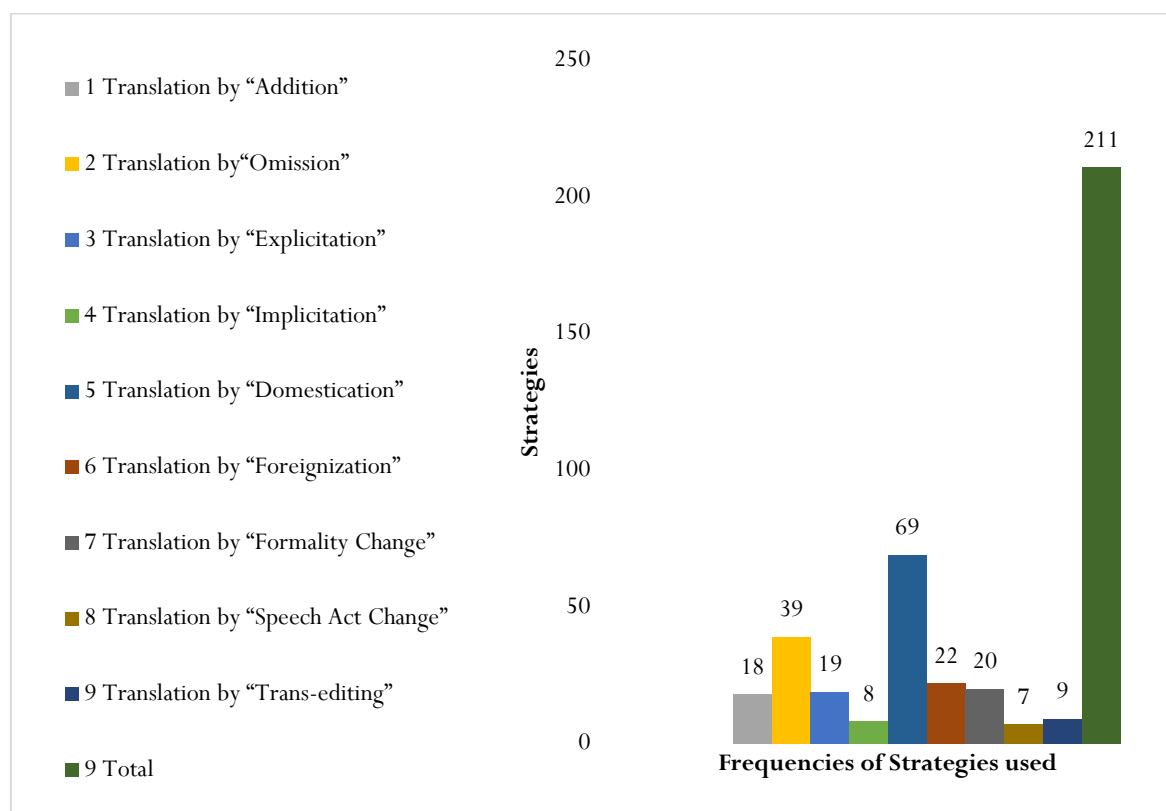


Figure 2. Frequency of translation strategies found in Huan Yuan Shen's (黄源深) Chinese version of "The Last Leaf" by O. Henry

These tables and figure show how Huang Yuan Shen (黄源深) translated the short story "The Last Leaf" into Chinese. The translator utilised all strategies in his translation. The most common way to translate is through "domestication," while the least common way is through "speech act change." Through the implementation of these tactics, the translator improves the text's clarity, effectiveness, and readability for the audience. The original story "The Last Leaf" is an excellent example. Similarly, the translated Chinese version "最后一片叶子" can maintain the essence of the narrative.

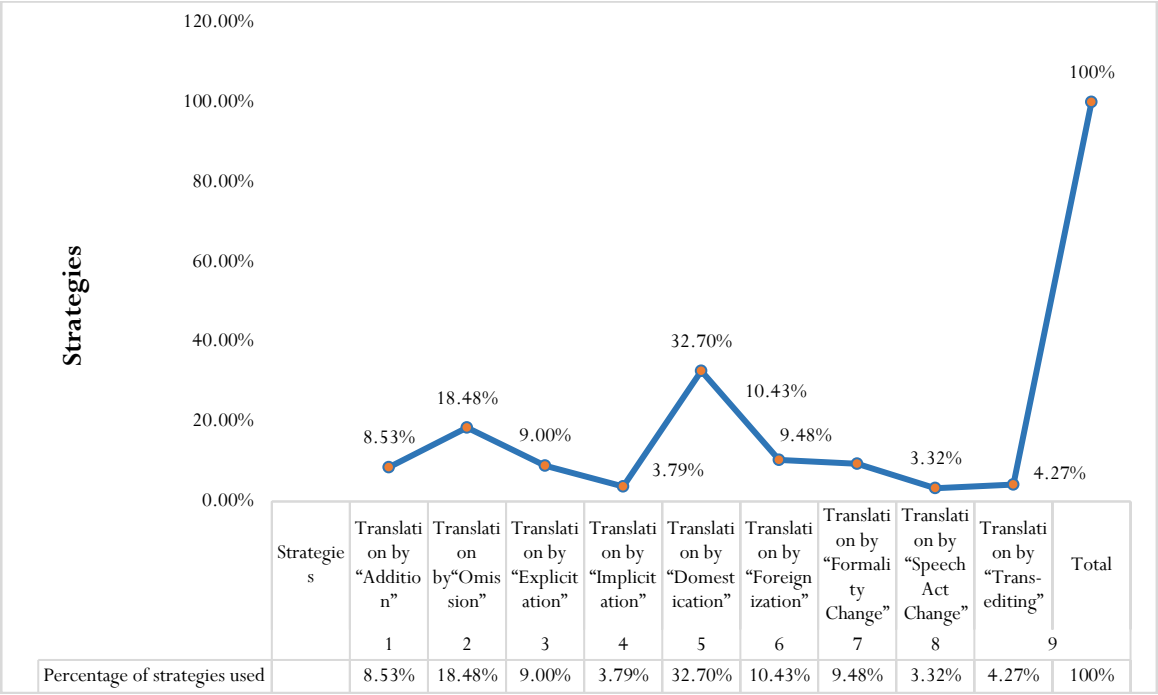


Figure 3. Percentage of translation strategies found in Huan Yuan Shen’s (黄源深) Chinese Version of “The Last Leaf” by O. Henry

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that Huang Yuan Shen employed all nine of [Bell \(1991\)](#) pragmatic translation strategies in his Chinese rendition of O. Henry’s *The Last Leaf*, with varying degrees of frequency and intent. The most prominently applied strategy was domestication (32.7%), which suggests the translator prioritized cultural familiarity and readability for the target audience. This aligns with [Venuti \(2017\)](#) view that domestication allows translators to create a sense of fluency by adapting cultural references and linguistic patterns to the expectations of the target readership.

The frequent use of omission (18.48%) and addition (8.53%) indicates a deliberate effort to restructure or simplify certain content for clarity or emphasis, especially where literal translation may have led to awkward or confusing expressions. This mirrors [Newmark \(1988\)](#) position that omission and addition, when used judiciously, can enhance the communicative value of a translation. Interestingly, explicitation (9%) and implicitation (3.79%) were employed to manage the balance between revealing and concealing background information. This reflects the translator’s nuanced decisions about what should be made clearer for the Chinese reader and what could be left implicit based on contextual cues. [Bell \(1991\)](#) identifies these strategies as key tools for aligning the target text with the cognitive expectations of the audience.

The lower frequency of speech act change (3.32%) and trans-editing (4.27%) reveals the translator’s overall fidelity to the original tone and structure of the source text. The translator was cautious not to excessively alter the intent or flow of dialogue and narration, preserving O. Henry’s stylistic subtleties. However, where cultural or narrative gaps were detected—particularly in idiomatic or colloquial expressions—formality changes (9.48%) and foreignization (10.43%) were selectively used. This shows an awareness of the tension between maintaining the foreign essence of the text and ensuring accessibility.

These strategic choices suggest that Huang Yuan Shen's translation is not simply a linguistic conversion but an interpretative act that mediates between two literary and cultural systems. By using Bell's model, the translator demonstrated sensitivity to linguistic nuances and cultural context, achieving both functional equivalence and emotional resonance. The data affirm that pragmatic translation strategies are crucial tools in literary translation, allowing for flexibility without sacrificing the original narrative's integrity. In conclusion, it highlights how a combination of translation strategies, guided by theoretical models like Bell's, can help overcome linguistic and cultural barriers in translating emotionally rich short stories. This case study not only illustrates the effectiveness of such strategies but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the translator's role as a cultural mediator.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the translation strategies employed by Huang Yuan Shen in his Chinese version of *The Last Leaf*, guided by [Bell \(1991\)](#) nine pragmatic translation strategies. The research aimed to identify which strategies were used, how frequently they occurred, and how they contributed to preserving the narrative's emotional and cultural essence.

The findings directly address the research questions presented in the introduction. First, the translator utilized all nine of Bell's strategies—addition, omission, explicitation, implicitation, domestication, foreignization, formality change, speech act change, and trans-editing—demonstrating a comprehensive and flexible approach to overcoming linguistic and cultural challenges. Second, domestication emerged as the most frequently used strategy (32.7%), highlighting its effectiveness in adapting the story to suit Chinese cultural and linguistic norms. Third, the translator successfully maintained the emotional tone, thematic integrity, and symbolic depth of the original narrative, particularly by employing culturally sensitive strategies such as implicitation, omission, and formality change where appropriate.

The benefits of these findings are multifaceted. Academically, the research offers empirical support for the practical applicability of Bell's model in literary translation, reaffirming the model's relevance in contemporary translation practice. Pedagogically, it provides a useful framework for translation students and educators to evaluate and understand the strategic decisions involved in literary translation. Practically, it underscores the role of the translator as a cultural mediator who must balance fidelity to the source text with the readability and emotional impact for the target audience.

The implications of this research are significant. For translation practitioners, it emphasizes the importance of strategic versatility and cultural competence. For researchers, it demonstrates the value of empirical, text-based analysis in evaluating translation quality. Finally, for readers and literary institutions, the study enhances appreciation of the translator's invisible labor in making world literature accessible, culturally resonant, and emotionally powerful across linguistic borders. Future research could extend this framework to compare different translations of the same literary work or apply Bell's model to other genres, such as drama or poetry, further contributing to the evolving field of translation studies.

The results show that certain parts are added, taken away, changed, and formalised to make up for the differences between two languages. The data analysis reveals that the translator employed many strategies in translating "The Last Leaf" to improve the translation's efficacy and quality while maintaining the original text's intended meaning. The "implicitation" method of translation is not used very often. The primary method utilised in this research is "Translation by Domestication." This method aids the translator in articulating the overarching meaning of the intended message.

The least commonly deployed strategy is "Speech act change." The translator utilised this method only seven times. The translator utilised "Translation by Addition," "A translation by Omission," "A translation by Domestication," "A translation by Foreignization," and "A translation by Trans-editing" to augment the narrative's metaphorical quality, allure, and clarity. Readers clearly understand what the book is about and agree with its main ideas. The translator's skilful application of strategies improves the text's clarity and worth for readers. The researcher expects that this study will partially fulfil the needs of students aiming to improve their translation skills by analysing the translation methods utilised by a distinguished translator. Moreover, the researcher hopes that future researchers could improve studies in translation by utilising more advanced approaches and analysis.

Author's declaration

Author contribution

Ei Khine Zune: data collection, methodology validation, formal analysis, conceptualization, methodology, data analysis, writing-original draft-review and editing, funding acquisition. **yang li:** data curation, resources, and supervision. **Zin Nandar Win:** software development, data visualization and writing—review and editing. grammar validation and checking, project administration, and critical revision of the manuscript.

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Data availability

The authors state that the data of this study are available to access for educational purposes only by sending a request e-mail to the corresponding author. It is strictly prohibited to use the data for commercial and personal uses without any permission from the authors.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this research and publication.

Ethical clearance

This research did not involve human participants, animals, or any sensitive data requiring ethical approval.

AI statement

This article is the original work of the author without using AI tools for writing sentences and/or creating/editing table and figures in this manuscript.

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